

MOTACILLA VIRIDIS, Gmel.

The Grey-headed Wagtail arrived in flocks on the Arctic circle on the 5th of June, and soon became extremely abundant. It does not seem to extend its range beyond the limit of forest-growth, and disappeared about lat. 69°.

MOTACILLA CITREOLA, Pall.

This beautiful bird was the first of the yellow Wagtails to arrive at our winter-quarters. I secured the first example on the 4th of June, and afterwards found it very abundant on the tundra as far north as we went.

MOTACILLA MELANOPE (Pall.).

One solitary example of the Grey Wagtail fell to my gun on the 6th of June. As this is the first time that this bird has occurred within the Arctic circle, so far as I am aware, it may be looked upon as an accidental occurrence. I may remark that my bird, with a tail measuring 3·75 inches, is intermediate in form between the eastern and western varieties.

[To be continued.]

XXIV.—*Notes on a 'Catalogue of the Accipitres in the British Museum,' by R. Bowdler Sharpe (1874). By J. H. GURNEY.*

[Continued from p. 164.]

BEFORE referring to the genus *Helotarsus*, to which I shall next have occasion to advert, I am desirous of briefly noticing an additional specimen of *Circaëtus cinereus* which has recently been acquired by the Norwich Museum.

This example, which is from Abyssinia, agrees closely in coloration with that from Nubia described in my last paper (*antè*, p. 162, no. 18), and, like it, has no white bases to the feathers on the under surface.

Its principal measurements are :—Wing 22·2 inches, tarsus 3·9, middle toe *s. u.* 2·4, culmen 2·1.

I have already mentioned that I consider the genus *Helotarsus* to be an abnormal member of the *Circaëtine* group; and I am desirous of offering a few remarks upon it, as supplementary to those contained in Mr. Sharpe's volume.

The geographical range of *H. leuconotus* is stated by Mr. Sharpe to be "North-Eastern and Southern Africa;" but it also extends to Senegal, an adult specimen from Bissao being preserved in the Norwich Museum. There seems, in fact, to be but little, if any, difference between the geographical ranges of *H. leuconotus* and *H. ecaudatus*; and Mr. Sharpe remarks that the former "is perhaps the fully adult bird" of the latter; but in this view I am not disposed to agree, as many specimens have been kept in confinement in this country, amongst which I have never heard of one having changed from a rufous back to a cream-coloured, or *vice versâ* *. I ought, however, to add that in an adult specimen of *H. leuconotus*, which I recently examined in the Strickland Collection at Cambridge, there is a decided appearance of faded rufous on the tail, though not on the back.

Von Heuglin has some noteworthy remarks on this subject in his 'Ornithologie Nord-Ost Afrika's,' vol. i. p. 80, of which the following is a translation:—"Specimens with white back and tail are found in the whole of Africa. Vierthaler observed the transition through moulting from the red brown to the white-backed bird, whilst I have shot a newly-moulted one of the last-named plumage the dorsal feathers of which were only partly grown, but these also showed the white plumage. We also saw plainly, several times, pairs of the white-backed variety. Most of the specimens we found on the White Nile and in Kordofan were white-backed; the Abyssinian birds were all brown-backed."

I venture to think that Vierthaler's note, referred to in the above extract, only implies that he had observed a specimen in confinement to change from the immature brown plumage to the white-backed adult dress, and not from the rufous-backed adult plumage to the white-backed. The following is a translation of Vierthaler's memorandum on the subject, which was made during his journey on the Blue Nile, and which, it must be admitted, is not so precise as could be

[* In the Zoological Society's Gardens are two whatever red-backed specimens, received in 1873, which show no signs of change into the white backed form.—EDD.]

wished :—" Upon a *Helotarsus ecaudatus* I could to-day distinctly recognize white shoulder-feathers (*H. leuconotus*, Pr. Paul of Würtemberg). This, however, as I can with perfect certainty assert, is nothing but a variety of age. Ulivi, a merchant at Chartum, has for more than a twelvemonth kept such a bird in confinement. It appeared to me to be two years old, and has, in its last moult, from February to April, also obtained white shoulder-feathers, which before were wanting." (*Vide* 'Naumannia,' 1852, p. 50.)

I regret that I can throw no further light upon this question; but I may add that, according to my observation, the creamy-backed specimens (*H. leuconotus*) are more rarely sent to this country than the rufous-backed (*H. ecaudatus*), and especially so from Southern Africa, where *H. leuconotus* appears to be scarcer than it is to the north of the equator.

Both in *Helotarsus ecaudatus* and also in *H. leuconotus* the colouring of the wing is subject to a curious difference in adult specimens, which is not referred to by Mr. Sharpe, but which has engaged the attention of various other ornithologists, though hitherto without its being satisfactorily accounted for. This difference may be briefly described as follows :—In some adults all the secondary feathers are black, tinged with green on the outer and with brown on the inner webs, and the greater coverts are of an intense black, without an apparent tinge of any other colour; whilst in other adults the greater coverts are, with the exception of more or less black on some of the feathers, coloured like the lesser and median coverts, *i.e.* a lustrous stone- or wood-brown, and the secondaries (except those nearest the body, which are either black or brown more or less tinged with black) are of a greyish brown colour with black tips, the grey-brown forming a conspicuous bar across the folded wing.

The late Jules Verreaux considered this greyish bar to be peculiar to the female bird; and the following note on the subject is extracted from a letter which he wrote to me in the year 1864 :—" Quant au sujet de l'*Helotarsus*, vous n'ignorez pas, sans doute, la différence immense qui existe dans les ailes entre les sexes; la femelle a les remiges secondaires presque entièrement nuancées de gris, tandis que le mâle n'en a guère

que les couvertures ; j'en ai tué cent fois et je m'en suis assuré sur la nature."

Verreaux's view appears to have been in great measure shared by Finsch and Hartlaub, who, at p. 52 of their 'Vögel Ost-Afrika's,' speak of the female of *H. ecaudatus* as distinguished from the male "areâ alari griseo-brunneâ multo majore."

The late Sir Andrew Smith, on the contrary, when describing this species in the 'South-African Quarterly Journal,' referred to the grey-barred wing as common to both sexes ; and in this view he is followed by Mr. Sharpe, though not, as I understand, on the authority of dissected specimens.

Von Heuglin, who has given a useful figure of each of these phases of plumage on tab. ii. of his 'Ornithologie Nord-Ost Afrika's,' also appears not to have considered the banded wing peculiar to the female, but seems to have been unable to satisfy himself as to the true significance of this difference.

Prof. Barboza du Bocage is disposed to consider the difference in question to be due to age, and remarks, at p. 42 of his work on the Birds of Angola, "nous croyons, d'après ce que nous avons pu observer sur des individus vivants de cette espèce, que les remiges secondaires, d'abord toutes noires, deviennent, avec le progrès de l'âge, grises marquées d'une bande terminale noire."

I cannot say that I agree with this view, as I have seen no such change in progress in the living birds which have come under my notice in this country, and as I think that I have been able to trace in some of the skins which I have examined a passage from the immature dress to the black-winged phase in some individuals, and to the grey-winged in others.

My own observations have been too limited to be of much service in deciding the question at issue ; but, as far as they go, they tend to confirm the view held by M. Verreaux.

I have had no opportunity of examining an adult male the sex of which I was able to feel certain had been verified by dissection ; but I have examined four adults ticketed as females, in regard to all of which there is reasonable ground for believing that the sex had been so verified, and all of

which exhibit the grey bar across the wing. Of these four females, one, now preserved in the Norwich Museum, was obtained in Natal by Mr. Ayres, who marked it as a female; a second, also ticketed as a female, died at Knowsley, and is now in the Derby Museum at Liverpool; and the two others, both marked as females by the collectors, and preserved in the British Museum, were obtained, the one by Mr. Petherick in Kordofan, the other by Mr. Blanford at Bedjak in Abyssinia. This last specimen, I may add, has, by a clerical error, been entered in the list of specimens, at p. 301 of Mr. Sharpe's volume, as a male.

In conclusion, it may be useful to note that, in both editions of Mr. Layard's 'Birds of South Africa,' an error has by some accident crept into the account there given of the adult plumage of *H. ecaudatus*, which is described as having "the lesser wing-coverts rufous." They are always, so far as I have observed, a of lustrous stone-coloured brown, darker in some individuals than in others, but never in any degree rufous.

[To be continued.]

XXV.—*Preliminary Remarks on the Neotropical Pipits.*

By P. L. SCLATER, M.A., Ph.D., F.R.S.

(Plate X.)

IF the Pipits of the Palearctic Region, and even those of Europe, are not yet fairly understood, as would seem evident by what has been lately written on them by Mr. Seebohm, Mr. Dresser, and other ornithologists, how much less likely is it that we should be well acquainted with those of South America? The latter are indeed in a sad state of confusion; and though I have been collecting American Pipits for many years, and endeavouring to get together a good series of specimens from authentic localities, it is only now that I feel in a position to improve matters a little by putting forward the conclusions I have come to in the shape of a preliminary revision of such of the species as are found within the limits of South and Central America.